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SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP:AMACDONALD

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SUBJECT: SANAA'S ANTI-PIRACY CONFERENCE PLUMBS THE DEPTHS
OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Attendance was high at the February 10-11 UK-funded maritime security conference in Sana'a. Participants agreed to better information sharing and increased capacity building, but were unable to decide on the mechanisms to reach these goals. Although constrained by a lack of resources, the Yemen Coast Guard presented a strong case to focus regional efforts in Yemen. END SUMMARY.

WHO TO CALL?

¶2. (SBU) The regional representatives attending the maritime security conference agreed for the need to share information to better utilize the limited resources in the area. This idea stemmed from frustration expressed by the Puntland and Somaliland representatives who said they had intelligence on where and whom the pirates are, but did not know how to report this information to the international and regional communities. Each country was asked to provide a single point of contact for maritime safety issues. When asked who the Yemeni point of contact was, however, Yemen Coast Guard (YCG) General Director of Operations CDR Shugga Almahdi told Poloff, "I am not sure. My operations center?" (Note. The ROYG appears not to have designated an authority on anti-piracy; during a February 10 meeting Director of the Foreign Minister's Office Abdul Hakim al-Eryani told Pol/E Chief that he "thought" the ROYG's contact was the Minister of Transportation. End note)

WHERE TO TRAIN?

¶3. (SBU) The delegates also agreed on the need for additional training, but there were concerns about duplicating CJTF-HOA and International Maritime Organization (IMO) efforts already in place. The UK and European Commission's description of the proposed expansion of the Yemeni training center to include regional players as "complementary" to other initiatives did not convince the Djiboutians, who expressed concern that the conference was overriding the IMO's decision to build a center there. While the UK and YCG delegates attempted to distinguish between the administrative functions of the Djiboutian center and the operational functions of the Yemeni center, suspicions of encroachment remained.

WHO PAYS?

¶4. (SBU) Discussions on regional capacity building focused primarily on Yemen's capabilities; however the

representatives from Somaliland, Puntland, and Somalia pleaded their case for more assistance. "Yemen lacks the capability to pursue the pirates," Abdu Hersi, Director General of Fisheries in Puntland told Poloff, "So the international community needs to decide if they want to continue losing the battle against the enemies (pirates) in the sea, or help us fight them on land, where they can be contained."

15. (SBU) Meanwhile, the YCG remains handcuffed by financial constraints, despite rumors that the organization will not be affected by the ROYG's 50% budget cuts. "We are waiting to see if the President will give the YCG a special exemption from the budget cuts," General Director of Operations Almahdi told Poloff during the conference, "but for now there is no money for travel, for fuel; it is a very bad situation." He has been forced to stop all anti-smuggling patrols and is no longer able to go to Aden to do inspections. If Yemen is to participate in the "joint exercises" recommended during the outcome of the conference, then a donor will have to pay for everything, said Almahdi, including the YCG's fuel.

COMMENT

16. Due to its existing infrastructure, long coastline, and proximity to the international shipping channel, Yemen makes a strong argument to become the region's anti-piracy focal point, despite hesitations from its Horn of Africa neighbors who are also maneuvering for a piece of the anti-piracy assistance pie. END COMMENT.

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